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ABSTRACT

Empirical validation of the Self-Identity Development Model of Oppressed People (SIDMOP) prompted the choice of a multi-methodological approach that would test the underlying theory and not the participants' ability to perform a matching task. Few identity developmental models of oppressed people have been systematically developed, and even fewer have been empirically validated. SIDMOP is based on a nontraditional psychological framework that theorizes a nonlinear growth process, while most measurement tools in the field are based on linear thinking. Validation of current research on oppressed people has led to the development of attitudinal and cognitive measures such as the Racial Identity Attitude Scale (RIAS), and the Gay/Lesbian Identity Questionnaire. SIDMOP has been developed to understand others in an experiential way. The model was developed systematically and thoroughly, using an emic process, and additional clinical research may be all that is necessary for validation. However, if the model is to be developed for further research, content specific instruments need to be developed for each oppressed group that include the following issues: (1) the effect of the participant's world view, selective memory, and social desirability; (2) the possibility of "false positives"; and (3) the effect of the participant's age and current developmental tasks. (FMW)

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# VALIDATION OF AN IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT MODEL

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## VALIDATION OF AN IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT MODEL

Few identity developmental models of oppressed people have been systematically developed and even fewer have been empirically validated (Cass, 1984; Highlen et al, 1986). While the theoretical models available to address the identity process continue to expand, the methodologies used to validate such theories lag behind. As Parham and Helms (1985) suggest in their research, the identity development process may be more complex than previously believed or harder to operationalize than expected. Such methodological difficulties may in actuality be based in theoretical uncertainty. As long as there is "confusion among many theorists as to what identity actually means and how this meaning can be translated into the developmental process", there will be difficulties in measurement of the identity development process (Cass, 1984, p. 146). This lack of clarity and consistency within the identity literature limits both "the degree to which the validity of a model can be adequately tested and also the extent to which the models can be compared" (Cass, 1984, p. 164).

In the validation of SIDMOP, we found ourselves affected by many theoretical and methodological challenges. SIDMOP has consciously been developed from nontraditional frameworks such as Afrocentric psychology and Eastern and American Indian philosophies. Since scientific research occurs within a given time period, geography and cultural/social context and because "values affect virtually every stage of the investigatory process" (Myers, 1981, p. 6), choosing alternative psychological models which are endorsed by members of oppressed groups is both

appropriate and necessary. Despite myths of objectivity, our underlying beliefs which often go unquestioned and unspoken, deeply affect how we structure our reality and do research. These theoretical frameworks affect how both the content and process of change are viewed. Within SIDMOP growth is not seen as a one-dimensional linear process as it is in many classic developmental theories. Rather growth is seen as a continuous and circular pattern where one re-experiences the process of development at different levels throughout one's life.

By basing our theory on an alternative world view where spirit and matter are unified, we further complicated these issues. In essence, we were theorizing a nonlinear growth process in a field where most measurement tools are based in linear thinking. From the beginning we have addressed those concerns by using a diversity of empirical methods. Multiple research methods allowed us to create more of an emic process where an individual's situation could be viewed from within her or his culture. By using an emic process, any methodology can be helpful in understanding the truth from a participant's point of view.

While research is currently being completed on a diversity of oppressed groups, much of that research has focused on Blacks, specifically the Cross (1971) model. Acculturation research which tends to be different in focus from identity development studies has primarily worked with Chicano/Latino people, Asians and Asian-Americans. Cass (1984) represents one of the few non-racial identity development research programs in her study of Lesbian and Gay identity formation.

Several quantitative research models have been used to validate the identity development models of Cross (1971) and Cass (1979). The study by Hall, Cross and Freedle (1972) operationalized the Cross model and has been identified as a research prototype for future identity development studies (Atkinson, Morten & Sue, 1983). In their study, if the statements developed for each stage were accurate reflections of beliefs about the identity process of Black people, then there would be high agreement among participants regarding which items they sorted together as characterizing each stage of the model. In this research, participants take on more of an observer role in describing and responding to the identity development process. The purpose of this approach is to test the basic tenets or assumptions of a model. From that initial card sort study, Parham and Helms (1981) developed the Racial Identity Attitude Scale (RIAS) which has captured the essence of one cognitive aspect (i.e., attitudes) of the Cross model.

Cass (1984) developed a questionnaire to validate her model of Lesbian and Gay identity formation. She articulated 16 dimensions relevant to the identity development process and created profiles for the six hypothesized stages. Participants chose which stage best applied to them and then took the Gay/Lesbian Identity Questionnaire which measured cognitive, affective and behavioral aspects of the 16 dimensions. By including those three dimensions, Cass built on other models which tend to be more cognitive or attitudinal in focus. Predictions of how participants at each stage might respond were based on her identity model. By comparing the questionnaire

responses of participants at each stage to the predicted response, Cass (1984) obtained some support for her model.

All of these research frameworks have their strengths and weaknesses which were taken into account when devising how SIDMOP was to be validated. Our world view affected the purpose of the model we developed as well as the research program chosen. If one develops a model for the purpose of understanding others in an experiential way, formal quantitative research may not be important. If models are developed systematically and thoroughly using an emic process, then additional exploration through one's clinical work may be all that is necessary. However, if the model is developed for further research, then effective methods for doing formal research must be identified.

For further illustration, I will explore the process through which SIDMOP is being developed and validated. Once our basic model was created, we completed a number of qualitative interviews of men and women from diverse oppressed groups. We used unstructured interviews which allowed participants to tell their stories in their own words. This approach best fit the world view upon which SIDMOP was based for it honored individual meaning and perception. Although formal data analysis was not completed, the process was very helpful in expanding and refining the model. The qualitative information allowed us to test some basic assumptions about the identity process and gain more knowledge about how development occured. Methods for analyzing interview material are often criticized for their subjectivity, although by using participants' own words, one can actually reduce researcher bias. As Gilligan (1982) states, <u>how</u> people

talk about themselves and their lives is always significant. In addition, debates over scientific analysis of data seem insignificant when one theoretically believes self-knowledge is the basis of all knowledge. Using this same methodology, a rigorous study could be completed at a later date as means of increasing understanding of how the Transformation phase is experienced. It would be necessary to identify individuals in the Transformation phase of development and have them tell their stories. Content analysis of the interviews could then be completed for systematic understanding.

Currently my disseration research is using a modification of the Hall et al. (1972) study to help us further understand our model. While this "card sort" research can be a stepping stone to later quantitative studies, there are some problems which must be explored. Some of the major issues in doing this type of research are:

1) how does the individual world view or identity development of participants affect how they complete the sorting task; how does selective memory affect the validation process?

2) how does social desirability affect the sorting process?

3) how does one minimize the possibility of "false positives"; can participants sort correctly yet not agree with the model?

4) how does the age and current development tasks of participants affect their world view and how they approach the sorting process?

The next step in the validation process might be to further quantify the process by developing an instrument in an emic way.

Measurement of this sort can be used for further research as was done by Parham and Helms (1981) for the Cross model or instruments can be used to test model assumptions a la Cass (1984). For SIDMOP, content specific instruments would need to be developed for each oppressed group. In addition, a common core of questions would need to be created for two areas: 1) attitudes, feelings and behaviors toward other oppressed groups and 2) a measure of spiritual-material integration. Some of the major issues in doing this type of research are:

1) social desirability

2) how to capture an ongoing process of development using an instrument which can only provide a snapshot or glimpse of the process?

3) age and current developmental tasks of participants

Once at this point, hopefully the question of validity of the model will be clear. However, validity and reliability of each instrument would need to be established using a diversity of oppressed groups. Given all of this information, a combination approach to validation was chosen for our model. For each SIDMOP stage, descriptive paragraphs were developed as well as statements focused on beliefs, feelings and behaviors. Participants were asked to place items into stages as well as put the stages into a sensible order in terms of the identity development process. Since one's identity is likely to influence one's sorting, additional data were collected on the racial identity of participants (e.g., RIAS for Blacks; Suinn-Lee Asian Self-Identity and Acculturation for Asians). Because SIDMOP is an inclusive model, participants include a diversity of oppressed

groups: Blacks, Chinese-Americans, Japanese-Americans, Korean-Americans and Vietnamese people.

There are many crucial issues to consider when devising a methodological plan to validate an identity development model. In designing the SIDMOP study the most difficult issue was choosing the most effective ways to validate the model. It was crucial to design a way to test the underlying theory and not participants' ability to perform a matching task. Clearly the questions raised in this paper need to be studied so that we can refine the process of doing research on identity development. Based on my experience, I firmly believe in a multi-methodological approach which will test a theory to its fullest. Without such research, our theories are destined to create more questions than answers.